

Ponemah Mills Workers' Houses
Shetucket and Norwich Avenues
Taftville
New London County
Connecticut

HABS No. CONN-241

HABS
CONN
6-TAFT

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

PONEMAH MILLS WORKERS' HOUSES

HABS
CONN
6-TAFT

Address: Shetucket and Norwich Avenues, Taftville,
New London County, Connecticut

Present Owner: Mr. Daignault

Present Occupant: Various tenants

Present Use: Tenement houses

Brief Statement of Significance: These six-family frame tenements are the largest of three types of extensive employee housing built by the Ponemah Mills in Taftville.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: These three six-family tenements were built by the Ponemah Mills and rented to their employees. They are one of three types of workers' housing built by the Ponemah Mills. The basic type which supplied most of the housing was a two-family tenement, one-and-a-half stories high. The company started building these when they first began construction of the mill in 1866. The three six-family tenements were the second type constructed sometime before 1900. After 1900 a third type, a four-family tenement not much larger than the original two-family tenement, was built. In 1934, when the company began selling its housing, Ponemah Mills owned 206 dwelling houses. For the history of this sale, see Part I, B, Supplemental Material, below. In 1960, Ponemah Mills owned only three houses for the top officers of the company.
2. Date of erection: Between 1871 and 1900.
3. Sources of Information: R. H. Hunt, "Ponemah Settlement" (Student paper in office of Prof. Carroll L. V. Meeks, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut/c. 1959/). John D. Nolan, History of Taftville, Connecticut (Norwich, Connecticut: The Bulletin Press, 1940).

- B. Supplemental Material: The following is extracted from John D. Nolan, History of Taftville, Connecticut (Norwich: 1940), pp. 43-44:

Sale of the Ponemah Tenement Houses

For the last several years many of the textile manufacturing companies have disposed of their tenement houses, either at

auction or at private sale. At the present time (1940) it is probable that nearly all the houses in such villages have become private property. In 1934, the Ponemah Mills decided to dispose of the greater number of such houses, and decided to sell them at private sale, if possible, through the agency of G. L. and H. J. Gross, of Providence, R. I. One hundred and eighty-seven were to be sold, and the preference was to be given, for a specified time, to the tenants occupying the houses. One hundred and one dwellings were sold during the first week, and after a few more days of a closed sale, the public was permitted to buy the dwellings. The agents established their headquarters in the Community building at Taftville, and interest in the sale was high as many of the tenants sought to secure their own homes. There are 206 dwellings listed in the assessment of the Ponemah Mills.

It was stated that the Community building, boarding house, 15 houses occupied by overseers and second-hands were reserved by the mill management and were not to be sold. Deeds were delivered between June 1st and 10th and the mill management had agreed to take back a mortgage of 60 per cent of the sale price. A policy of title insurance was given the purchaser and the company also agreed to furnish electric light and water at fair rates, as in the past. The prices for the dwellings ranged from \$1600 to \$2800 for the frame structures, most of which are two and four family houses. There were four houses sold however for \$1250. The six-family dwellings, were sold for about \$5000; 16 brick houses on Terrace avenue were listed at \$4000 and one at \$4200. These brick structures, with slate roofs contains nearly all modern improvements.

Mr. Gross during this sale, informed me that the company was selling these houses at what they considered a fair valuation. This would conform to the taxation or assessment laws of both Rhode Island and Connecticut. When the greater number of these houses were erected, building material was very cheap, labor was very low, carpenter's receiving from \$1.25 to \$1.50 per day of 10 hours. The governmental expenses of the town were very light, the first selectman received \$500 per year, with no expenses; assessor, \$300 per year and the tax collector about \$1100 per year; consequently taxes were very low, and rents in Taftville very cheap, tenement of six rooms rented for \$1.50 and some less, per week. When the houses went to private ownership, taxes jumped and rents more than doubled.

Houses on Providence street were assessed at close to the purchase price, but on the other streets they increased at an average of \$500 or more above the price for which they were bought, and the majority of the people failed to realize that they were paying on an over valuation. In the deeds it

it was stipulated that until May 1, 1944, no building other than a dwelling house, or a private garage shall be erected or maintained on any lot on said plot, with the exception of the lots fronting on Second Avenue. Until said date no building other than a dwelling house, store, shop or private garage shall be erected or maintained on said plot. Any part of which garage is nearer to the line of the street on which the house or said lot faces than the rear line of said house or is nearer than 30 feet to the line of any other street. The Ponemah Mills agree that all taxes assessed against the land upon the lists of October 1, 1932 and 1933, will be paid in full as soon as the amount is definitely determined. As long as the Ponemah Mills are obligated to maintain sewers, and drains, the buyer must pay to them, for the privilege, \$5 per year.

Regarding defaulting of payments the decds read: If the buyer shall default in making the payments herein provided, the Ponemah Mills shall be at liberty upon refunding to the buyer all payments made hereunder forthwith, to offer said premises for sale elsewhere; but nothing contained herein shall prevent the seller from enforcing full performance of the agreement.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: These are six-family frame tenements, built as employee housing by the Ponemah Mills.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: These three six-family tenements are long rectangular buildings, 2-1/2 stories high, facing east.
2. Foundations: Brick
3. Wall construction: Frame covered with clapboards now painted gray with white trim.
4. Porches: Front doors on the east elevations of the buildings are sheltered by small flat roofs supported by large scroll shaped brackets.
5. Chimneys: One brick chimney for each apartment or six chimneys for each of the three units.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Each apartment has a front and a rear entrance with a four panel door set in a simple wood frame. The front entrances have rectangular top lights. The apartments have identical, but alternating reflected plans, so that the entrances are paired rather than evenly spaced.
- b. Windows and shutters: Double hung windows in unrelieved frames without shutters. Front windows have single light sash, over single light, rear windows have 6 light sash over 6 light, and third floor attic windows have 3 light sash over 3 light.

7. Roof

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof, shingled.
- b. Eaves: Simple boxed eave with cyma recta crown mold and a coved bed mold.

C. Technical Description of Interior: The apartments are identical, but with alternating reflected plans. Each unit is the full 2-1/2 stories high, with two rooms, a kitchen, and a parlor, on the first floor. The interiors are simply finished with plaster walls and ceilings and wood floors and trim.

D. Site

1. General setting: The three buildings are arranged end to end in a long, slightly curved row. They are on level ground between two roads with shallow front and rear yards.
2. Enclosures: Back yards are enclosed by picket fences about 3' high. Front yards are enclosed by stone walls about 3' high.
3. Landscaping: Informal landscaping with lawn, trees, shrubs, and flowers.

Prepared by Osmund R. Overby, Architect
National Park Service
October 1960.